

## THE MOSQUE AS A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CENTRE

Since the Holy Quran provides not only a few religious rituals but also gives directions for all aspects of human activity, it has been inherent in the very character of Islam that religion and politics should go hand in hand. The same individual was ruler and chief administrator in the two fields, and the same building, the mosque, was the centre for gravity of both politics and religion. This relationship found expression in the fact that the mosque was placed in the centre of the camp, while the ruler's abode was built immediately adjacent to it.

The objective of the Muslims in accordance with several verses of the Holy Quran is to establish prayers to enjoin good upon the people and to restrain them from committing wrong. In another verse the Muslims have been referred to as the best people and as such entrusted with the above mentioned obligations. These verses are very significant and sum up the entire teaching of the Quran, and the duties of the Muslims. They entail enormous responsibilities on the Head of the State as well as on all the believers and involve the State not only to carry out these orders within its own jurisdiction but also beyond it if occasion arises. In order to fulfill these obligations, the Muslims are required to establish an ideological State based on fraternity, equality, liberty and social justice. For the purpose of practical realization of this ideological State, the institution of the Mosque is a fundamental necessity. Although some learned scholars assert that for purposes of prayers the mosque is not as fundamental a necessity for Muslims, as is the case with the Jews and the Christians, it is my opinion that the case is otherwise. The mosque may not be a consecrated institution as is the case with the Synagogue or Church and there may not be priesthood in Islam as in Judaism and Christianity, yet the Quranic injunction is to establish prayers in a particular place which is to be called "Masjid." As such the prayers have to be said in congregation under the leadership of the Head of the State or his representatives in the various mosques of the State. To prove this contention, that primarily prayers should be offered in congregation, the Muslims are always enjoined upon to use the word "We" instead of "I" while offering prayers. This means that prayers have got to be offered in congregation and not individually.

This is also proved by the practice of the Holy Prophet and his immediate successors who always held the congregational prayers of the believers five times a day in the mosque of Medina. However, in case of illness or other contingencies the individuals are allowed to offer prayers at their homes or other isolated places.

The service of prayer, however, is to be performed in congregation in a mosque. While the private part is meant simply for the development of the inner self of man, the public part has other ends as well in view—ends, indeed, that make the Islamic prayer a mighty force in the unification of the human race. In the first place, this gathering of all people living in the same locality five times daily in the mosques, is intended to lead to the establishment of healthy social relations. In the daily services these relations are limited to a narrow circle, i.e., only to the members of the same neighbourhood, but the circle becomes wider in the weekly Friday service which gathers together all Muslim members of a particular locality and still wider in the two great "Id" gatherings; and the culminating point of this gathering reaches on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage when Muslims from all parts of the world assemble together. Thus prayer promotes social relation between the different sections of the Muslim community.

Far more important than this, however, is the levelling of social differences brought about by means of congregational prayers. Once within the doors of the mosque, every Muslim feels himself in an atmosphere of equality and love. Before their Maker they all stand shoulder to shoulder, the king along with his poorest subject, the rich arrayed in gorgeous robes with the beggar clad in rags, the white man with the black. Nay, the king or rich man standing in a back row will have to lay his head prostrating himself before God at the feet of a slave or a beggar standing in the front. There could be no greater levelling influence in the world. Differences of rank, wealth and colour vanish within the mosque, and quite a new atmosphere, an atmosphere of brotherhood, equality and love, totally differing from the outside world, prevails within the holy precincts. To be able to breathe, five times daily, in an atmosphere of perfect peace in a world of strife and struggle, or equality in a world where inequality is the order of the day, and of love amid and the petty jealousies and enmities of daily life, is indeed a blessing. And these lessons of fraternity, equality and love, when put into practice in daily life

serve as foundations for the unification of the human race and of the lasting civilization of mankind. In fact the five daily congregational prayers are meant, among other things, to carry into practice the theoretical lessons of equality, fraternity and social justice for which Islam stands and however much Islam may have preached in words the equality of man, fraternity and social justice, all this would have remained a dead letter had it not been translated into the everyday life of man through the institution of five daily congregational prayers.

Prayer in Islam, thus, not only enables man to realize the Divine in him, not only makes him drink deep at the fountain of Divine morals, purifies his heart and sets him on the right road to the development of human faculties, but it goes a step further and, levelling all differences, brings about love, concord and a true union of humanity. This last object, it can be easily seen, cannot be achieved without a regularly instituted form of prayer so that all men should gather together in mosques at the stated times and should stand up reverently, bow down and prostrate themselves before their great Maker as one.

### **The Mosques as a Cultural Centre**

Besides being its religious centre, the mosque is also the cultural centre of the Muslim community. Here the Muslim community is educated on all questions of its welfare. The Friday sermon is a regular weekly lecture on all such questions, but besides that, whenever in the time of the Holy Prophet and his early successors it became necessary to inform the Muslim community on any matter of importance, a sermon or a lecture was delivered in the mosque. Even during his last illness the Holy Prophet came out into the mosque and delivered a sermon to the people.

In addition to this mass education in the Holy Prophet's mosque, there were also arrangements for those who wanted to acquire learning. Men who had to be trained as missionaries for the spread of light and learning in distant parts of the country not only received their education in the mosques but also lodged in a place, called the Suffa, attached to the mosque. Many important mosques had also some Waqf property attached to them, their income utilized for the upkeep of the students and their teachers. In later time quite

in accordance with the earlier spirit, libraries were also kept in parts of the mosque, and some mosques had very large libraries attached to them containing upwards of 100,000 volumes.

In the time of the Holy Prophet and his early successors the mosque was the only centre of all kinds of Muslim activities. Hence all important national questions were settled. When the Muslim community was forced to take up *Jihad*, it was in the mosque that measures of defense and expeditions were concerted. It was, again, to the mosque that people were asked to repair when there was news of importance to be communicated. The mosque also served as the council-hall of the Muslims. In the time of Umar when two councils were appointed by the Caliph, it was in the Mosque that these councils met. Deputations from Muslim as well as non-Muslim tribes were received in the mosque, and some of the more important deputations were also lodged there. Juridical affairs were also settled in the mosque. The mosque was thus not only the spiritual centre. It was, indeed, their national centre in the truest and most comprehensive sense of the word. Thus it was through the Institution of the Mosque that all elements in the Muslim society were brought together on the same level.